UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY

SEP 14 1916

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Alternates

https://archive.org/details/memoirofjohnbrom00quin

MEMOIR

OF

JOHN BROMFIELD.

BY

JOSIAH QUINCY.

CAMBRIDGE:
METCALF AND COMPANY,
PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.
1850.

B
B868q
1881

MEMOIR OF JOHN BROMFIELD.

The judicious and timely donation to the Boston Athenæum by John Bromfield during his lifetime, and his endowment of the public with the chief part of his large property, by devoting it in his last will to the most important and interesting objects of charity and usefulness, render a memoir of his life peculiarly just and proper.

He was the last representative in America of the male line of a family distinguished, for more than a century among the citizens of Boston, for integrity and benevolence. It had its origin in Wales, where, in the reign of Edward the Second, it had extensive possessions. William Bromfield removed to England, was appointed by Queen Elizabeth Lieutenant of the Ordnance in the Tower, and purchased a great estate in the vicinity of London. His descendant, Edward Bromfield, was born at Haywood House, the seat of the family, in the New Forest, Hampshire, in 1648, and emigrated to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1675, where he became a merchant, eminent for activity, judgment, and integrity. His mansion-house stood in the street which now bears his name, on the site of the present Bromfield House, then "surrounded by fields and shady groves." He married Mary, the daughter of the Rev. Samuel Danforth, of

BURTON HIST. COLLECTION
DETROIT
EXCHANGE DUPLICATE

Roxbury, and granddaughter of the Rev. John Wilson, of Boston. Their son, Edward Bromfield, born in 1696, married Elizabeth Coney in 1722, became a merchant of character and influence, and died in 1756. The youngest of the sons of his numerous family was John Bromfield, the father of the subject of this Memoir. He married Ann Roberts, the youngest daughter of Robert Roberts, who emigrated to this country from Wales, and became a much respected inhabitant of Newburyport. The character of Mr. Roberts was marked by "uncommon decision and energy"; he was "stern, self-sustained, thinking for himself, with a never-wavering resolution to do what he deemed right, irrespective of the opinions and practice of others"; and the same spirit was so strikingly developed in his grandson, that it was said of him that the same Cambrian blood flowed in his veins as did in those of his maternal grandfather. Having been educated at one of the English universities, he bestowed on his daughter great advantages of education, of which she had the disposition and power to avail herself.

The current of her husband's affairs became troubled, and at last seriously embarrassed, by circumstances of which the war of the revolution was one of the causes. Their son, JOHN BROMFIELD, the subject of this Memoir, was born in Newburyport, April 11th, 1779. His early years were passed with his brothers and sisters, under the pressure of misfortunes involving the necessity of great pecuniary restraint, and with no refuge or support except in the elevated spirit of their mother, who was, in all respects, entitled to the epithet of "admirable." Beloved by all, by her children she was little less than adored. Such were the impressions made deeply on the mind of the writer of this Memoir, during many years of intimate friendship with this lady; whose virtues and character are accurately portrayed in the following touching tribute from her surviving daughter.

"In all the more trying exigencies of her life, her conduct was noble and magnanimous; nor was it less so, while pursuing the even tenor of her daily life-long course, unnoticed and unknown. Retired from the world, and needing not its stimulus of praise or applause, she was never happier than when surrounded by her nursery flock, to whose early training she devoted her almost undivided attention; and for this she was eminently qualified. Her own home school-education, under the supervision of her father, was the best that could be obtained. Her intelligent and highly cultivated mind, good judgment, modesty, sweetness of temper, together with a dignity of manners, commanding, yet strictly feminine, formed a charm that bound her children to her irresistibly, her life being to them *a living commentary* upon the truth and grandeur of what were to them her oracular teachings."

Mr. Bromfield, after receiving his early education from his mother, became, in 1792, a pupil of Dummer Academy, in Byfield, where his habits were so studious and his scholarship was so satisfactory, that his friends were advised to send him to the University; the means for which were kindly proffered by his father's sisters. With that decision and firm spirit of independence, which subsequently marked his character, he refused with grateful acknowledgments this kind offer, saying that he was resolved to make his own way to fortune, as a merchant; and accordingly at the age of fourteen he entered the counting-house of Messrs. Larkin & Hurd, of Charlestown, and afterwards, during the period of his apprenticeship, that of Messrs. Soley & Stearns. The failure of this house, just as he became of age, was the first cloud upon his prospects as a man of business; but with characteristic kindness he assumed, as far as was in his power, the settlement of their concerns, and devoted himself to their service, without reward, or the hope of it.

Mr. Bromfield thus entered upon life without patronage, and without prospects, other than such as his own talents and enterprise might open for him. The times were difficult. Several months elapsed, and every attempt to obtain mercantile employment failed. His desire of activity, and his earnest anxiety to begin the work which might lead him to independence, became at last insupportable, when he said to his sister, "I have made up my mind, I will no longer remain idle. I have spoken to a master-carpenter; I have made arrangements with him to teach me his trade; and, if for three weeks I continue unable to find mercantile employment, I will change my profession and become a mechanic." With those who knew the firmness of his character, it was unquestionable that he would have kept his resolution. Happily an opening occurred within the prescribed period, and he was enabled to enter the path he had prepared himself to pursue.

The confidence, which his conduct in relation to the concerns of Messrs. Soley & Stearns had created, as well as his known talents and urbanity of manners, soon opened to him opportunities for employment; but in whose service, or for what objects, is not at this day to be ascertained. By letters from him, preserved in the family, it is known that on the 16th March, 1806, he was at Rotterdam, as factor, or agent, for some mercantile house, and that success had not attended the enterprise, of which he had the superintendence. "I have been pursued," he writes to his mother at that date, "by the most untoward and sinister events. Forty days on my passage to Nantes, — fifty-three days embargoed, — I could not arrive in Holland until the first of March. Fortune has pursued me, undeviatingly, with ill luck; I cannot charge her with inconstancy. Existence is not worth possessing unaccompanied by independence of mind."

It appears that in April, 1808, he was again in Europe, in like service, with a similar result. On the 18th of that month, he wrote to his mother from London; "My fears of a bad voyage are completely realized. I have been obliged to land my cargo, and make a ruinous voyage for the gentlemen who were good enough to give me employ. My own loss will be total, of all that I have earned during my past life. The decrees of France and England are ruinous to American commerce; which is a whip-top, scourged by both parties. Though a neutral, it is attacked by all the belligerents." In the spring of 1809, he was intrusted with large funds by Mr. Theodore Lyman, senior, upon an agreement to remain in Canton for a year, as his factor; and for this purpose he was associated, as supercargo, with William Sturgis, who was appointed to the command of the ship Atahualpa, owned by Mr. Lyman, with joint control of the destined funds. At the request of the writer of this Memoir, Mr. Sturgis has favored him with the subjoined letter, conveying his impressions of the character of Mr. Bromfield.

"Hon. Josiah Quincy, — My Dear Sir: When you asked for reminiscences of our late friend, Mr. Bromfield, I readily promised to give them, and was gratified at having an opportunity to express and record the high estimation in which I have long held him. But, when I sat down to perform this promise, I found that I had undertaken a task not easily executed, and became conscious of my inability to convey to those not acquainted with Mr. Bromfield the impressions of his character and qualities, that are indelibly stamped on my own mind. He was one who can be appreciated only by those who knew him intimately; and of such the number is small, for he was by no means lavish of his confidence, and, though courteous to all, was intimate with few.

"My own acquaintance with him began under the following circumstances. In the spring of 1809 I was in command of the ship Atahualpa, belonging to the late Mr. Theodore Lyman, senior, preparing for a voyage to China. When nearly ready, Mr. Lyman decided to add another hundred thousand dollars to the large funds already provided, which sum might be left at Canton for investment out of the regular business season, in the expectation that it could be then done on the most favorable terms. This arrangement made it necessary that some one should be associated with me, who could remain a year at Canton; and Mr. Bromfield, who had previously been in the service of Mr. Lyman, was selected. We met for the first time only the day before sailing, and were wholly ignorant of each other's views, habits, and tastes.

"The relation in which we were placed, does not always tend to harmony and mutual good feelings. On shore we were upon a footing of equality; but at sea I was vested with exclusive and almost despotic power, to which he, in common with all on board, was bound to submit. In two voyages previously made to Europe, he had unfortunately been associated with ship-masters, whose narrow prejudices made them foolishly jealous of their authority, and disposed to regard as interference with it any inquiries or comments (however natural and unobjectionable they might be) made by the supercargo, relative to occurrences and passing events on ship-board. This induced Mr. Bromfield to practise extreme caution at the outset of our voyage; and he afterwards declared, that for the first week he scarcely knew whether the fore-topsail was set or furled, for, when walking the deck, he avoided raising his eyes above the direct line of vision lest he should be suspected of prying into matters that did not concern him, as had happened to him on previous occasions. We soon, however, came to a full

understanding; and I doubt if two individuals ever did, or could, make a four months' passage together more harmoniously and pleasantly. He was full of information on a great variety of subjects, and there was a dry humor and a piquancy in his unreserved colloquial intercourse that were perfectly fascinating; and I have never known a man whom I should prefer as a companion through the usual tediousness of a long passage at sea. There was even then, at times, a slight reserve and peculiarity in his manner, which became somewhat more apparent in after life; but these I was careful never to notice, and left him altogether free to act himself in every respect, so that our pleasant intercourse was never for a moment interrupted.

"His habits on ship-board were very regular. He usually appeared on deck an hour before breakfast time, and, after a formal exchange of morning salutations, would walk rapidly fore and aft the weather side of the main deck for some ten minutes, then join me on the quarter deck and break forth in his usual style, with remarks that never failed to interest and delight me. After breakfast he would occupy himself with his books while I was engaged in the usual avocations of a ship-master, which in my case were not very onerous; for, soon after getting to sea, I became satisfied that I was particularly fortunate in having selected a first officer (Mr. Daniel C. Bacon, then a very young man, scarcely more than twenty years of age, now one of our most estimable and successful merchants), so devoted to his duties and competent to perform them, that I might safely intrust all details to his care and management. This left me at leisure to pass much time in social intercourse with Mr. Bromfield; and having the mild climate and fine weather which the voyager usually finds on a passage to China in the regular season, every thing went on so smoothly and pleasantly, that when we anchored in Macao roads, on the evening of the 21st of

August, we could scarcely forbear regretting that our passage was so nearly finished.

"The next morning a very unlooked-for change came over us. At an early hour I despatched my first officer, Mr. Bacon, with a boat's crew for Macao, about seven miles distant, to procure a pilot for Canton river. Soon after, a fleet of armed vessels, apparently Chinese men-of-war, were discovered a few miles distant, standing directly for us. On the outward passage we had passed through the Straits of Banca, and near the spot where a brother of Mr. Bromfield had been attacked and cut off by Malays some years before. The fate of his brother very naturally led him to regard with more than usual suspicion and apprehension every native armed vessel; but I thought that he sometimes manifested these feelings in a greater degree than the occasion seemed to warrant, and did not always regard them so much, perhaps, as I ought to have done.

"When the Chinese vessels were within a mile or two of us, Mr. Bromfield came on deck, and I pointed them out to him, remarking, inconsiderately, "If those fellows should chance to be Ladrones (pirates), and knew that we have three hundred thousand Spanish dollars on board, they would be tempted to pay us attention in a way that might not be agreeable this warm morning." I instantly perceived that the suggestion alarmed him; and though I did not at the moment participate in the alarm, yet, regardful of his feelings, I promptly took measures for defence and escape, that ultimately saved us; but, had they been delayed till my own apprehensions were awakened, it might very likely have been too late, and our destruction inevitable. Had those who witnessed the whole transaction been disposed at first to ascribe Mr. Bromfield's alarm to timidity, the cool self-possession and firm intrepidity, with which he aided in defence of the ship when the danger became immi-

nent and an attack was actually made, would have fully satisfied them, that he was by no means deficient in personal courage, but was actuated solely by a prudent desire to avoid danger when nothing but disaster could result from useless exposure.

"Associated as we were in transactions at Canton, I could judge from personal observation of his capacity as a practical 'business man'; and such was the opinion I then formed, confirmed by the experience of after years, of his talents, qualifications, and sound judgment, that I could not select a man whom I should have preferred as an agent for the management of commercial business in any quarter of the globe. I left him at Canton, where he remained a year; and this voyage laid the foundation of the fortune he subsequently acquired, which was slowly but surely accumulated by persevering industry in the safest manner; for I doubt if he ever engaged in a transaction that the most fastidious prudence would have pronounced hazardous. He never commenced an adventure without a careful estimate of probabilities, or closed one without looking thoroughly into details and results. He often remarked, that 'many men are ruined by omitting to make figures.'

"His knowledge of commerce was extensive and accurate, and whatever he undertook to do was sure to be done in the very best manner. He frequently commented upon the loose and careless manner in which business is done in this country, and contrasted it with the European practice. 'Here,' said he, in his familiar way, 'if a purchaser is about to buy a cargo of box sugars, he will bore into one box, look at a second, kick a third, and take the lot; but in Europe they thrust an iron searcher through and through every box, and carefully examine every layer.' He admitted that a system of credit is indispensable in this country, but denounced in no measured terms the extent to which

we have carried it, as a fruitful source of commercial embarrassments and financial convulsions. To this dangerous extension and indiscriminate granting of credit he mainly ascribed the failure of three fourths of those who engage in trade and commerce.

"As his property increased, a portion of it was invested in various manufacturing companies; and, had some of his views in relation to this great branch of industry been adopted and carried out, the interest of those engaged in it would have been greatly promoted. He asserted that the manufacturers themselves were their own worst enemies, and maintained that all the injury they sustained from the unwise and vacillating policy of government, and the hostility of 'free trade' advocates, was trifling compared with the injury they inflicted upon themselves by premature and almost reckless increase of producing power. 'Why, my friend,' he would say to me, 'we manufacturers may clamor for protection, and rail at the government for its hostility to the manufacturing interest till we make ourselves hoarse, and it will do no good. The truth is, government has little power in this matter for weal or woe, and can only aggravate or mitigate, in a degree, the evils we bring upon ourselves *by competing with ourselves.* It is not the government, it is Messieurs A, and B, and C, and D,' (enumerating those who usually take the lead in getting up new manufacturing establishments), 'with their associates, who do the mischief by keeping production too far ahead of consumption; and, if the rapid growth of this country chance to bring demand up with supply, these gentlemen seem to strain every nerve to give supply the lead again, as if they dreaded that our occasional periods of prosperity would last too long. It is the eagerness to sell water-power, and find employment for their machine-shops, that prostrates the manufacturing business;

and we can only hope, that, as all these concerns are principally owned by the same individuals, they will by and by discover, that, where one dollar is gained by getting up new establishments, five are often lost by the consequent depression in price of the productions of those already in operation.' He was not alone in these views.

"Mr. Bromfield was familiar with matters of finance and currency. He perceived the adaptation of a mixed currency to the business and wants of this country, but was never free from apprehension that the paper element would predominate, and the country be flooded with irredeemable paper. He was proud of the financial position maintained by New England during the war with Great Britain from 1812 to 1815, at a time when all south and west of her borders failed to fulfil their engagements and suffered dishonor; but he was sadly troubled and deeply mortified at the course taken in 1837, when, in a time of profound peace and apparent prosperity, all the moneyed institutions in the country suspended payment, not (as they alleged) for want of means, but because they chose to consider it for *the public good* that they should violate their engagements and refuse to pay their debts. He deplored the circumstance as a national calamity, and seemed to feel it little less than a stain upon every solvent man's personal honor. 'It is not,' said he, 'so much the immediate effect that I deprecate, but I dread the consequences hereafter. If individuals who have once violated faith can never be relied upon afterwards, how can you expect that soulless corporations, if once permitted to disregard all laws with impunity, will refrain from doing so again whenever their interest can be thereby promoted. Corporations,' he added, 'are convenient and useful, but there is no safety in them unless regulated by stringent laws, and these laws strictly enforced.'

"When discussing 'usury laws,' Mr. Bromfield admit-

ted the necessity of establishing by law a uniform rate of interest to govern all cases in which no rate was stipulated; but he scouted the idea, that legislation could practically restrict the price to be paid for the use of money to a uniform rate at all times and under all circumstances. 'The value of the use of money,' he said, 'like the price of commodities, is governed by the great law of supply and demand; and this cannot be controlled by legislation. Usury laws, as they are called, are doubtless designed to protect borrowers and debtors. Do they effect this? Let us look at the practical working of them. We must assume that the borrower will always be disposed to obtain money at the lowest rate of interest. If he cannot obtain it at six per cent., it must be because it will command more. Then, if his prospects or necessities induce a willingness, or compel him, to pay more, the law steps in and forbids its being lent to him, directly, at a higher rate. How then is the borrower or debtor situated? He *must* have money; — he cannot borrow it at six per cent.; — the law forbids a *direct* loan to him at a higher rate, and he is compelled either to raise it by a sacrifice of property, or obtain it on loan in an *indirect* way, which every one knows is invariably attended with additional expense, that must be borne by the unfortunate borrower. If no other use could be made of money in times of scarcity but to lend it, the owner might be driven to let it go at six per cent. by the prohibition to take more; but at such times the current value of the use of money may be realized in many other ways than by lending it. In fact, it may be *legally* lent at any rate of interest agreed upon, provided it be *indirectly* done. If these views are correct,' he added, 'it is evident that usury laws put no effectual restriction upon lenders, but are onerous and injurious to borrowers; and this is confirmed by the fact that applications to the legislature for the repeal or modification of such laws come usually from borrowers, for

lenders are little incommoded by them.' As a question of morals, Mr. Bromfield did not recognize a difference between getting the current rate for the use of money and getting the market price for a bushel of potatoes or a barrel of flour; and, though habitual respect for the laws deterred him from violating them, yet he did not scruple to take the current rate for the use of money in a legal manner.

"Mr. Bromfield read much and thought more. The tendency of his mind was to investigation, but not speculation. He deemed it a waste of time, however, to investigate subjects upon which even an approximation to certainty could not be reached, and which promised no compensating results for labor thus bestowed. 'There are,' said he, 'enough practical and useful matters to be looked into to occupy the longest life.' He bowed to no authority in matters that admitted of difference of opinion, but chose to examine and collate the views of others, and then to form his own. I have never known one less disposed to adopt opinions, however high the source whence they emanated, without passing them through the alembic of his own mind. He often, therefore, rejected those prevalent at the moment, and was seldom carried away by the current of popular feeling. He was, if I may be allowed the expression, thoroughly *anti-humbug*, and regarded most of the exciting topics of the day with philosophic calmness, or with a feeling bordering upon disgust. You, Sir, can readily call to mind the excited state of political feeling in 1808 and 1809, upon questions of embargo, non-intercourse, &c., and will, I think, agree with me, that though too much bitterness is mingled with politics at the present time, yet this bitterness is mild compared with the rancor and hatred of political partisans in former days. Now ultra Whigs and violent Locofocos occasionally meet, in sweet communion, on 'free soil'; — then Federalists and Democrats only

came together quietly in the burying-ground, and even there with reluctance. It was scarcely to be expected, that Mr. Bromfield and myself should escape participation in feelings that pervaded the community at the time we left the United States; but, once beyond the reach of the exciting influences that surrounded us at home, things soon began to assume a different aspect; and, ere the passage was half over, we could discuss matters more impartially, and smile at the delusion that led to an undue appreciation of events ephemeral in their character, and temporary in their consequences. 'Ah!' Mr. Bromfield would exclaim, 'if those who take but a one-sided view of affairs at home could only look at them as we do, from the latitude of forty, South, how differently they would appear!'

"And in after years, when at any time undue excitement was got up upon any subject,— when politicians (self-styled patriots) were clamoring for the election of some favorite individual, or the adoption of some particular measure, as indispensable to the salvation of the country, he would touch me upon the arm with 'Ah, my friend, if people could only view these matters from forty, South, would n't they wonder at their own delusion and folly?' His opinions, being deliberately and carefully formed, were adhered to somewhat tenaciously; but, though well prepared to defend them, he generally shunned controversy, and it was only with intimate friends that he would willingly engage in dispute. Whenever he did so, his manner was invariably courteous and considerate. He was a firm believer in the great truths of Christianity, and in its adaptation to the condition and wants of humanity, but had no sectarian prejudices, and scarcely a preference. He attached little importance to forms, and was willing that every man should worship after his own fashion. He held that man was accountable to God alone for his belief, and to society only

for his actions. I have more than once heard him quote approvingly the sentiment of the poet: —

> 'For modes of faith let zealous bigots fight;
> His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right.'

With these liberal views he could, of course, tolerate the great diversity of opinion on such subjects; and he extended this spirit even to what he deemed ill-judged or useless efforts to proselytize. He was willing that Jews should cling to the faith of their fathers and remain Jews, and equally willing that visionary enthusiasts should associate for their conversion. He concurred heartily in the sentiment of Lord Bacon, that the great object of life, and the highest duty of man, are the 'multiplication of human enjoyments and the mitigation of human sufferings.'

"Mr. Bromfield never married. It was a subject seldom touched upon by his friends, as they knew it rather annoyed him. Occasionally, however, it would be brought up; and, when questioned as to his motive for remaining in a state of 'single blessedness,' he would treat it pleasantly, and reply, in substance, that he regarded the other sex too highly to inflict upon any one of them such a husband as he should make. 'No woman,' he would say, 'who has a grain of discretion would consent to bind herself to such a nervous old bachelor as I am, and a woman without discretion would be — not to my taste.' The truth, doubtless, is, that Mr. Bromfield's characteristic prudence deterred him from changing his condition until he had acquired a competency; and this he did not accomplish till he was so far advanced in life, that the same prudence prevented his venturing upon the change at all. He was temperate even to abstemiousness; and solicitude to preserve health led him to try experiments in diet, exercise, and exposure, that I fear impaired his constitution and shortened

his life. The manner of his death was just what he often expressed a wish that it might be, — sudden and without suffering. 'I doubt,' said he, 'if I shall be better prepared at one time than another; and therefore, when the "grim tyrant" comes, I hope he will make short work of it.' Were I to sum up his most prominent traits, I should say they were unwavering devotion to whatever he deemed duty; unwearied industry and unfaltering perseverance in whatever he undertook; but, above all, unswerving integrity and uncompromising self-respect. Pope took a contracted view of the glorious works of the Creator, when he wrote the oft-quoted line, —

'An honest man 's the noblest work of God.'

But honesty, in the broadest sense of the term, though not of itself sufficient to constitute the *noblest* work of creation, is an indispensable element in every character worthy of respect; and Mr. Bromfield had this element in perfection. Wiser and more talented men have lived, but an honester man never died.

"I am, dear Sir, respectfully and faithfully,

"Your friend and servant,

"Wm. Sturgis."

During his residence in Canton, Mr. Bromfield received repeated and valuable consignments of property from Henry Lee, Esq., either on his own account, or from persons for whose confidence he was indebted to Mr. Lee's recommendation. His grateful feelings on these occasions were repeatedly shown in his letters to his mother and sisters. Thus, in March, 1810, he wrote: — "I am much obliged to Mr. Henry Lee for his attentions. Without the smallest claim on my part to the smallest portion of his time and pains, he has not failed to use both to my advantage." And again, in the following November, "I am deeply indebted

to Henry Lee for unremitting marks of friendship, and for seconding my interest on every occasion."

Mr. Lee having been applied to for his reminiscences of Mr. Bromfield, and his views concerning his character, the following graphic delineation of them was received, of which he has kindly authorized the publication.

"Boston, April 4, 1850.

"Hon. Josiah Quincy, — Sir: I am gratified that a memoir of the late John Bromfield is about to be prepared. He was a man worthy to be held up to praise and imitation for his private virtues, not less than for his public benefactions.

"I can give but little aid in writing the history of his life. Our acquaintance commenced in 1806, and our friendly intercourse has been often interrupted by long intervals, during the residence of both of us in Europe and Asia.

"Nature had bestowed on Mr. Bromfield an extreme sensibility. His temperament was ardent, and his family affections intense. His mother, who was one of the most admirable women of her time, was beloved and venerated by all, and by her son with an attachment bordering on devotion. From her precepts and example Mr. Bromfield derived many of the most valued traits of his character; and the desire to secure an independent provision for her and for his brothers and sisters, whom he also ardently loved, gave probably the first bias of his mind to that determined spirit of independence which formed the groundwork of his efforts. In his early life, and during many years of his manhood, he was tried by adversity; and from this discipline he derived many of his peculiar habits, and also many of those admirable traits of character for which he was distinguished. His life was not eventful. It had

no striking incident to make it particularly interesting. In this respect it was not, perhaps, much distinguished from that of the most of our merchants and seamen, who seek in distant seas the profits of a commerce peculiarly exposed to danger from the lawless character of the nations with whom, or, in the vicinity of whom, it is carried on. There is, however, one incident of Mr. Bromfield's life, in which he had an opportunity to display his personal courage, presence of mind, and force of character, which was highly applauded at the time, and which ought not to be omitted in any memoir of him. It occurred in the year 1809, on board the ship Atahualpa, of which William Sturgis, Esq., was commander, and on board of which Mr. Bromfield was passenger, and was exhibited in defence of that ship when attacked by pirates in the China seas. You will probably receive from Mr. Sturgis a fuller account of this affair, than any I can give. But, as the successful defence and escape of the ship from imminent peril were chiefly attributable to the prowess and skill of Mr. Sturgis, he may possibly feel a delicacy in dwelling on the facts with so much particularity as they deserve, highly creditable as they were to all concerned.

"Mr. Bromfield was joint supercargo with Mr. Sturgis, the commander of the ship; they having intrusted to their management a large amount of specie, then on board. While at anchor in Macao roads, and beyond the protection of its fort, a large fleet was, early one morning, perceived, bearing down towards the Atahualpa. The ships, full of people, were some of them of great size, and were disguised as Chinamen; but in fact they belonged to Ladrones, residents of the neighbouring coasts and islands, who make robbery and murder their means of subsistence. They are bold, reckless, and efficient. The Chinese authorities acknowledge their inability to restrain their depre-

dations. Many foreigners, as well as natives, have fallen victims to that treachery and cruelty, for which the Malay race are proverbial. It is, perhaps, impossible to be attacked by a more fierce or savage class of men, or one more qualified to fill the stoutest heart with dread. A brother of Mr. Bromfield had been a few years before assassinated by them, in the same seas, under very tragical circumstances; and the sight of the coming enemy naturally excited in his mind sad reminiscences of his brother's fate. Other circumstances, probably, tended to fill his mind with apprehension. The chief officer (Daniel C. Bacon) of the Atahualpa, with a great part of the ship's crew, was absent, having been sent away that morning, on duty, to Macao; and what remained of the ship's company were scarcely sufficient at once to manage the ship and defend her. Captain Sturgis was, however, equal to the exigency. Cutting his cables, he at the same time hoisted his sails, in order, if possible, to get within the protection of the fort, and gave battle to the enemy; and, after a serious engagement, in which some of their balls penetrated to the cabin, and the combustible materials they discharged had wellnigh set the ship on fire, he succeeded in placing her under the protection of the fort at Macao.

"In this defence, Mr. Bromfield was second only to the commander in courage and activity. He took command of a gun, and responded to the orders of the captain with a self-possession and heroism, which, with the other qualities of his head and heart, endeared him to Mr. Sturgis for ever afterwards.

"In the early periods of Mr. Bromfield's career, he was chiefly employed as a supercargo in foreign voyages, having very valuable interests intrusted to his management. The times, however, were those of embargo, non-intercourse, and war; and the circumstances by which his agency was

surrounded were unpropitious. But, although much of the property which was committed to him was lost, no shadow of reproach was ever cast either upon his judgment, conduct, or fidelity; and he enjoyed to the last the entire confidence of all those who had constituted him their agent.

"After the restoration of peace, in 1815, Mr. Bromfield employed the small property he had then accumulated in adventures abroad, particularly in Eastern commerce, from whence he drew large profits, in consequence of his thorough acquaintance with Oriental customs and trade. When, however, through the increase of competition, this employment of his capital became less profitable, he withdrew it, and subsequently devoted himself to its increase by investments, which the course of the exchange offered, and which he made with great prudence, avoiding all risks, and seeking safe rather than extravagant gains.

"His rules of action were fixed, such as he deemed it the imperious duty of a merchant habitually to observe; and these he applied to the management as well of his own property as of that intrusted to him. To put any thing important in jeopardy for the sake of great profits, — to engage in hazardous enterprises on borrowed capital, and, for the sake of gain to ourselves, to risk the property of others, — were frequent topics of his reproof and reprobation; the delicacy and firmness of his principle in this respect are, in this '*go-ahead* community,' so uncommon, that they may well be enumerated as among his '*peculiarities.*' His tastes and habits in the latter periods of his life had indeed the aspect of singularity. Though he shunned society, he did not seek solitude. He lived in the retirement of his own lodgings, yet at proper seasons was on the exchange, where he attended to his own business, — but troubled himself not at all with that of others. He had

a morbid dislike of notoriety, so that, beyond a very circumscribed circle of old friends and acquaintance, his worth was unknown and unappreciated. This aversion to notoriety led him always to avoid all conversation relative to himself or his own purposes. Being once questioned concerning the engagement with the Ladrones in the China seas, with a design to draw him into an account of it, he kindly and characteristically replied, — 'That affair has been a little exaggerated, and too much praised. I will only say, I am incapable of wishing that even an enemy of mine should be ever placed in so *disagreeable a predicament.*'

"Although Mr. Bromfield avoided frequent intercourse even with those towards whom he stood in intimate and friendly relations, yet this did not arise from any disrespect or want of affection for his fellow-men; still less could it be referred to any mental or moral inaptitude to appreciate the pleasures and advantages of social intercourse, and its elevating and civilizing tendencies. For no one, who enjoyed the pleasure and advantage of his society, could fail to perceive the cordial and respectful spirit in which he sustained his part. His conversation was replete with information, entertaining, and instructive. His mind, naturally strong, had been improved by careful cultivation, and his observations indicated great meditation and research. His opinions were characterized by originality and independence; frequently differing from those generally entertained, and often from those of the persons with whom he conversed; yet he listened with attention and respect to the arguments of those who differed from him, and yielded the same right of independence to the judgment of others, which he claimed for his own.

"Mr. Bromfield's manners, on the first approach, were somewhat formal, even to his friends and acquaintance, but

in nothing were they austere or repulsive. There was in his demeanour so much of dignity, refinement, and gentleness, that even a transient acquaintance could not fail to perceive that he possessed all the qualities which characterize a gentleman.

"His systematic avoidance of general society, and of all the amusements which occupy the time and thoughts of most men, and his love of seclusion, were indeed striking peculiarities in his character, and were the result, unquestionably, of habits which, acquired first from a sense of duty, and being continued for many years by the events of his early life, became at last fixed and inveterate. He was also constitutionally liable to physical infirmities, which subjected him to great self-denial. He was, therefore, temperate from principle, and often abstemious from necessity. The exact fulfilment of his moral and social obligations became, in time, the absorbing principle of his conduct, and guided every action of his life. Economy in expenditure, also, which was commenced at first from necessity and duty, resulted ultimately in an unremitting habit. It was the effect neither of selfishness nor of avarice. For, although he scrupulously avoided all ostentatious charities, he was habitually in the custom of contributing to the wants and the comforts of those, whose necessities came within his knowledge. As his wealth increased, his desire to be extensively useful increased with it. Having effected his own independence, and also acquired what he deemed sufficient for that of the relatives he loved, he extended his views, and embraced within their sphere more general charities, to which he determined, that, either during his life or at his death, they should be appropriated; his design to accumulate being ever associated with the intention to accomplish some wise and benevolent object. To this end he repressed every temptation to self-indulgence, and sought

every occasion of self-sacrifice. The spirit which actuated him is not only strikingly manifested in his munificent bequests to the public, but still more by his private legacies.

"In conclusion, I cordially respond to the tribute paid to his memory by the Trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital, in their recent Report. 'Notwithstanding the many acts of liberality of Mr. Bromfield, he was not a seeker of notoriety or praise. He was remarkable for integrity, sound judgment, quiet resolution, and public benefactions. What he believed to be his duty, he did. He is remembered for his public bounty. But he deserves as much respect for his private virtues. Those who knew him best, esteemed him the most.'

"I am yours with great respect,

"HENRY LEE."

To these letters of Mr. Sturgis and Mr. Lee, are here subjoined two others, from Messrs. Augustine Heard and Daniel C. Bacon, gentlemen, like the former, of high mercantile standing, and also, like them, universally appreciated in this community for the soundness of their judgment, and for their capacity to estimate justly the qualities of mind and heart which constitute character. The concurrent opinions of such men, the uniformity of their affection for Mr. Bromfield, and their similar testimony to the elevated principles and motives by which he guided his life, form a tribute to his memory, beyond which nothing can be hoped for or desired.

"Boston, April 18, 1850.

"HON. JOSIAH QUINCY, — Dear Sir: You have expressed a wish that I should communicate to you any thing that may occur to me, that would be useful to you in writing

a memoir of our late friend, Mr. Bromfield; and I have a sincere wish to do so, but am doubtful if any thing, that I can say, will aid you.

"My first acquaintance with Mr. Bromfield was in China, in, I think, 1809, where he was joint supercargo of the Atahualpa with Mr. William Sturgis. He remained after the departure of the ship, as Mr. Lyman's agent in China, where he was considered a model man, not only by his countrymen, but by the Chinese with whom he had dealings. In all his transactions he was scrupulously just and accurate, which gave him the entire confidence of all who knew him; and through life he always sustained the character of a man of sterling principles, pure mind, and kind dispositions, never for a moment forgetting the claims of those around him. He was constitutionally a gentleman, and could not, if he would, have been otherwise, — possessing an unusual degree of refinement, combined with great intelligence and sound judgment. His knowledge was always at command, and always at the service of his friends. In speaking upon any subject in which he felt an interest, the ease and flow of his language kept pace with the vigor and rapidity of his thoughts, and his conversation at such times was most interesting. In his habits he was exact and uniform, and to his industry and punctuality may be attributed his remarkable acquisition of information on so many topics. He was always careful of his personal expenditures, from a sense that extravagance would not conduce to his happiness; this, combined with his business talent, enabled him to exhibit during his lifetime a degree of liberality that few men can bring themselves to do.

"In a conversation that I had with him the day before the attack that carried him from among us, when he was unusually cheerful, he spoke very freely of leaving the world, and of the desirableness of being taken away upon

a short summons, and named a number of instances of those whom he had known, who had departed without suffering, or giving trouble to their friends (which was always a consideration with him), and without the painful sense of a gradual wasting of the powers and strength of manhood, which is usually attendant upon protracted illness. This comparatively happy exit, however desirable, he observed, could not be secured; we must submit to our destiny. Upon this occasion he remarked, quoting some ancient authority, that death, as it was the fate of all the living, should not be considered an evil; that leaving this world was part of a great plan unnecessary for us to understand.

"Mr. Bromfield's character was not marked by points which served to make him popular with the world; yet, if it can be said of any one, it may of him, that 'he was a man without guile,' and full of excellent qualities.

"I can hardly suppose that the foregoing will be of any service to you; yet I shall be glad if it should be so. All Mr. Bromfield's friends must rejoice that a remembrance of him is to come from *your* hands.

"I am, dear Sir, very respectfully,

"Your obedient servant,

"Augustine Heard."

"Boston, March 23, 1850.

"Hon. Josiah Quincy, — My dear Sir: Your favor under date of the 27th instant, requesting me to give you any reminiscences I may have concerning the late Mr. John Bromfield, or any opinion or facts I possess illustrative of his character, is before me. I am aware that I am totally incompetent to do justice to the character of such a man as Mr. Bromfield. I was acquainted with him from 1808 to the time of his death, and can truly say I have

always had and still retain the greatest respect for him as a high-minded moral man, of the strictest integrity, and one of the most agreeable and pleasant companions, both on board ship and on shore, that it was ever my good fortune to be acquainted with. I made a passage with him in the ship Atahualpa, in 1809, to China. During that voyage the ship was attacked off Macao, by twenty-two large Ladrone junks, some of them twice the tonnage of the ship; and it was entirely owing to the courage and good judgment of Capt. William Sturgis, and the great exertions of the others on board at the time, only two thirds of a crew (myself and four men being absent at the time), that saved the ship from capture, and the lives of all on board; Mr. Bromfield having performed all that lay in his power during the engagement, with the same unflinching discharge of duty, however arduous, which marked his whole life. Mr. Sturgis's conduct for courage and good judgment in that engagement received the highest praise from all those who saw and were capable of judging of the manner in which the ship was worked, and his great exertions to save the ship and crew from the pirates.

"I am, Sir, very respectfully,

"Your obedient servant,

"DANIEL C. BACON."

These testimonies from men of highly intelligent and independent minds, to whom different opportunities for observation gave an intimate knowledge of Mr. Bromfield's principles and motives, and the causes of his peculiarities, present a striking delineation of his character.

The high reputation for ability and integrity he thus attained among his immediate associates, and the small capital he acquired during his agency in Canton, laid the foundation of his fortune. After his return to the United States

he employed himself in the management of his own funds, and in again superintending agencies in foreign countries, intrusted to him by his friends, in which his knowledge of commerce and his known judgment gave great promise of success. Fortune, however, resumed her former unpropitious aspect. "I have been captured," he writes to his sister from Cadiz, in January, 1813, "and detained ten weeks in Gibraltar. The consequence is ruin to the business I had undertaken. I regret that I have never been able to impart to you a single instance of my success. But it is a melancholy truth, that in the whole course of my life I have never arrived at a good market."

Mr. Bromfield was now about thirty-four years of age, and the want of success attendant on his foreign voyages induced him to place beyond the reach of such vicissitudes that attainment of independence which was the object of his efforts.

Fixing his residence in Boston, or its vicinity, he watched, with a practised eye and a skilful foresight, the ebb and flow of the exchange. Sometimes in connection with the house of Bryant & Sturgis, or of Henry Lee, he engaged in adventures abroad, well conceived and carefully insured; at others, he availed himself of the phases of the money market, which he diligently observed and well understood.

Thus, by the vigilant and careful investment of his small capital, by the rigid practice of economy, in seclusion from general society and from the temptations of vanity and amusement, by deducting scarcely any thing from his acquisitions beyond what was necessary to his own subsistence, and to that charity to others which he habitually practised, he gradually executed his plan of life, attained independence for himself, and the power of conferring important benefits on others and on the public. His books show that

his kind acts and charitable contributions, though secret, were constant. The bounty of his spirit to his friends and relatives was uninterrupted, discriminating, and most liberal. To the general claims of pauperism he listened dubiously, and often with disregard, being of opinion, that indiscriminate charity was one of the fruitful causes of the state it pretends to relieve. To public solicitations he seldom yielded. Although the care of his property and its gradual accumulation made the chief employment of Mr. Bromfield, his time was not exclusively devoted to affairs of business. His knowledge of life and acquaintance with the world opened to him never-failing sources of thought and reflection, which were readily placed at the service of all who had recourse to him. In contributing to the instruction of others, his language was easy and eloquent; and in what he uttered there were ever displayed research, meditation, various information, and deep wisdom. Books were to him a constant source of occupation and amusement. In their company, he felt not the want of general society. Self-sustained, and with an ever-pervading sense of his responsibility to Heaven, he valued but little, and courted not at all, the common opinion of mankind.

As his property increased, his desire of usefulness increased with it. The objects to which his acquisitions should ultimately be applied were, probably, never out of his mind. The right of selecting them was maintained and vindicated with a pertinaciousness belonging to that spirit of independence, for which he was distinguished.

In December, 1845, Mr. Bromfield communicated to the writer of this Memoir the liberal design which occupied his thoughts, in language at once characteristic, and indicative of a fixed purpose. "My property," said he, "has increased beyond my hopes and even my desires. I now feel myself at liberty to gratify a prevailing wish of my

heart, and to do something permanent and useful for a city, in which a great part of my life has been passed. Circumstances have made it my duty to accumulate. But I see no value in wealth, and have little regard for it, except for its ultimate use; but in respect to this I feel a sense of great responsibility. Hitherto my view, as to that ultimate use, has been limited to the provisions of my last will. But, as my property has increased, I begin to doubt whether an application of a part of it to an earlier object of usefulness be not most wise. By will, a man bestows only what he can no longer keep. It is a fund of generosity, formed out of the expectations and rights of relatives and heirs. Nothing can be strictly called a gift, except that which a man executes in his lifetime. For this I am prepared and desirous. But I must be unknown. I have extreme repugnance to notoriety." The conversation then turned upon the amount he proposed to give, and to the objects to which it should be applied. He observed, that he felt justified in giving away *fifty thousand dollars*, but after great deliberation he had resolved to restrict his gift at present to *twenty-five thousand*. As to the object of his bounty, the wants of the Boston Athenæum were known to him, and he had concluded to come to its aid. His pleasure in literary pursuits made a chief part of his enjoyment, and probably decided the direction of his liberality. Mr. Bromfield's repugnance to be known as the author of this gift to the Athenæum was with great difficulty surmounted. But, when it was urged that its origin could not long be concealed in an inquisitive community, — that he might be subjected to inquiries, which his strict regard to veracity would render it impossible to evade, — and also that it was as much a man's duty to be true to himself, as to be just to others, he finally acceded; and reluctantly consented, that if the proposal of

his gift and its terms were accepted by the Proprietors of the Athenæum, his name should not be withheld.

The friends of Mr. Bromfield were aware, that the peculiarities of his life and the delicacy of his sensibility had prevented many of his contemporaries from forming a just estimate of his worth and his generosity; the publicity thus given to his bounty was, therefore, to them, highly gratifying; and it was apparent that the satisfaction, derived from perceiving that his character and liberal views were appreciated and understood, added much to the happiness of the few remaining years of his life, and more than compensated for the annoyances, arising from the constant application for charity and patronage, which this public donation immediately occasioned.

His death, an event which he had accustomed himself to contemplate and be prepared for, was granted him in a manner, for which he had often expressed a hope. On the morning of the 8th day of December, 1849, after an early walk, he returned to his apartment; and, when called to breakfast, he was found insensible from a stroke of apoplexy. Although he was apparently aware of the presence of his sister and her husband, and of other friends, who were immediately summoned to his residence, and who watched over his last hours, distinct consciousness never returned; and on the following day his life, which he had endeavoured to lead under a sense of being "ever in his great Task-master's eye," was terminated, without gradual decay or protracted suffering.

His property was found after his death considerably to exceed two hundred thousand dollars, invested with great judgment and care, and was distributed by his last will with a wisdom and precision altogether in unison with the principles and habits of his life. Having fulfilled to the utmost the duties of affinity, affection, and friendship, he de-

voted his remaining ample resources to the service of the public, giving

To the Massachusetts General Hospital, and to the McLean Asylum, in equal shares,	.	$40,000
" " Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary,	.	10,000
" " Boston Female Asylum,	.	10,000
" " Asylum for Indigent Boys,	.	10,000
" " Farm School at Thompson's Island,	.	10,000
" " Asylum for the Blind,	.	10,000
" " Seamen's Aid Society,	.	10,000
" " Town of Newburyport, for its improvement and ornament,*	.	10,000
		$110,000

By these noble and generous benefactions to the public, Mr. Bromfield erected an enduring memorial to his own virtues, and to a name of which he was the last representative. And this sketch of his life may be appropriately closed in the words of his nearest surviving relative: —

"The distinguishing trait of my brother's character was his quick discernment of the true and the real, appertaining to our human existence, and his power of separating them with almost equal sagacity from their apparent and nominal value. At no period of his life did he look

* The following are the provisions of Mr. Bromfield's will in relation to this subject: —

"I order the sum of ten thousand dollars to be invested, at interest, in the Hospital Life Insurance Company, in the city of Boston, so and in such manner as that the selectmen or other duly authorized agents of the town of Newburyport, for the time being, may annually receive the interest which shall accrue or become payable for or in respect of said deposit; and I direct, that, by or in behalf of said town, the interest so received shall be annually expended, — one half in keeping the sidewalks in the public streets of said town in good order, and the other half in the planting and preserving trees in said streets, for the embellishing and ornamenting of said streets for the pleasure and comfort of the inhabitants."

3 0112 098694158

forward to being made happy, — hardly to being made happier, — by the attainment of that honorable competency for which he struggled nobly and labored unremittingly. Yet this insight, and superiority to the usual incitement to activity, united with a nervous temperament and a delicate constitution, never led him to seek refuge in repose. With systematic, unflinching, personal self-denial, he strained every nerve, and exerted every faculty, to procure for others, not merely the means of alleviating the ills of life, but of gratifying every rational indulgence and merited enjoyment. One portion especially of his mercantile experience strongly tested the self-reliance, decision, and indomitable courage of his character. The grand basis of religious principle laid by his mother, combined with intellectual strength, and power of will, and moral energy, enabled him to sustain himself through a long life, to the accomplishment of his plans of usefulness, and the fulfilment of his destiny."